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The Rise of Commercial Intercourse between Russia and China.
Translated by RICHARD VALPY, Esq.

[The following short notice of the trade between Russia and China was first given in the "Lloyd Autrichien" newspaper.]

IT appears that the interchange of commodities by the merchants of these two nations was first established in the year 1616. The Emperor Michael Feodorowicz, in 1629, directed the authorities on the frontiers to cultivate more intimate relations with the Chinese, and, in 1655, the first envoys to China were despatched by the Czar Alexej Mikhaïlowicz, but they were not received. A second mission, which set out in 1675, charged with rich presents for the sovereign of the Celestial Empire, was received, but met with little success. During this state of affairs war broke out between the Russians and Monguls, in the course of which the former possessed themselves of the town of Alhazin. After protracted negotiations, and the sacrifice of large sums of money, the first treaty between Russia and China was concluded at Nertchinsk on the 18th of August, 1689, and it was agreed that the merchants of the two nations should be permitted to trade with each other. For some years after this time, the intercourse of the traders was subject to interruption, and, at a later period, the articles of Nertchinsk were confirmed at Selinginsk, without the provision, however, of sufficient guarantees for the personal safety of the merchants.

In 1719 Peter the Great sent an ambassador, accompanied with superb gifts of weapons, horses, &c., to the warlike emperor Kam-tchi, for the purpose of renewing the treaty of 1689. Kam-tchi consented to allow a Russian consul to reside at Pekin from that time, to watch over and protect the merchants of his country whose caravans resorted to that city. The Emperor of Russia engaged on his part to send back into the Chinese empire 750 families of the Tungouses, who had established themselves on the Russian territory.

At this period the Czar was in Persia, which considerably retarded the negotiations, and the parties in China, who were hostile to the Russians, took advantage of this circumstance to break the alliance which had scarcely known a beginning, and no trade was carried on between the two countries until the reign of the Empress Catherine.

In 1727 Catherine delegated Count Ragowsinski, by whom the Emperor of China sent a letter to the Governor of Ourga, authorising him to conclude a treaty of commerce. By this treaty a free right to trade was secured to the subjects of the two countries, and the caravans which went to Pekin were to enjoy the same privileges, both on the frontiers and in the interior; the couriers of the two countries were to be allowed to pass unrestricted, and China relinquished her claim to the restitution of the 750 Tungousian families. A place bordering on the two countries was, however, determined on for the transaction of their commerce, and the establishment, in 1727, of the market of Kiakhta, on the Russian frontier, and of Maïmatchin, on the borders of China, was the result of this treaty.

Kiakhta, situated on a river of the same name, is in the Government of Irkoutsk, and contains about 500 houses, and 3,300 inhabitants. It derives great importance from being the only commercial

place in Siberia, and serving as the mart for China. It is surrounded with lofty granite mountains, which are covered with forests. The fort of Troitskosareskaja or Kiachtinskaja is placed on one of the chief summits of the mountains, and commands a view of the streets and warehouses of the Chinese market-town, as well as of their fort. On another eminence the boundaries of the two empires may be seen—the Russian being distinguished by a mound, surmounted with a cross, and the Chinese by a pyramid. The fort of Kiakhta has three gates, leading respectively to Selinginsk, the Chinese fort, and the river, and it is protected by palisades and bastions. In consequence of the water in the wells being insalubrious, and there being frequently but little water in the river, the Russian Government has often contemplated the removal of this factory to another place. The Chinese market is 60 toises, or 380 feet, distant from the Russian fort.

Notwithstanding the preceding treaties, the commerce between Russia and China was insignificant until the year 1784, and the great importance that it has subsequently acquired may be traced to the supplementary articles of 1793.

In the month of December the principal fair is held at Maïmatchin, and it is productive of considerable benefit to Siberia, from the concourse of merchants which it assembles from all parts of the empire, and the powerful impetus the different branches of industry receive from their presence.

Barter is the only mode of trading. The Russians bring woollens, furs, beaver skins, foxes' tails, hides, leather, glass wares, steel, cotton goods, and nankeens manufactured in Russia. In addition to these articles a considerable quantity of furs, the produce of the American Company, is brought by way of Ochotsck, and forms a very thriving branch of the import trade. The great demand is for skins of a common description, which the Chinese dye, with very great success, to imitate sable and other furs of the first class. For this purpose, foxes' skins from the Aleutian Islands, near Behring's Straits, are most sought after; and next, the skins of wolves from the rivers and coasts.

The trade in woollens is very important, and owing to the increase of the Russian import duties, the cloths of Prussia are quite shut out from the market of China, where they were sold to the amount of ten millions of thalers, or nearly £1,500,000 sterling. The manufactories of Warsaw, and of Siblowa, near Moscow, now furnish the requisite supply, which has to be transported, not without risk, a distance of 8,000 versts, or 5,300 miles, to the frontier market of exchange, which is situated more than 2,000 versts, or 1,300 miles, from Pekin.

The articles brought by the Chinese for exchange, consist of tea, precious stones, raw and manufactured silk, wool, rhubarb, and other drugs, porcelain, colours, silver, gold dust, &c. The consumption of tea in Russia is very great, as the middling classes make a more frequent use of that beverage than the rich. Every year 50,000 chests of tea arrive at Maïmatchin and Kiakhta, of the declared official value of 7,107,500 silver roubles, or £1,185,000 sterling, and to this may be added 231,825 silver roubles, or £38,650 sterling for inferior tea used by the people of the South, which makes the total declared value of tea, so received, amount to 7,339,325 silver roubles, or £1,223,650 sterling.